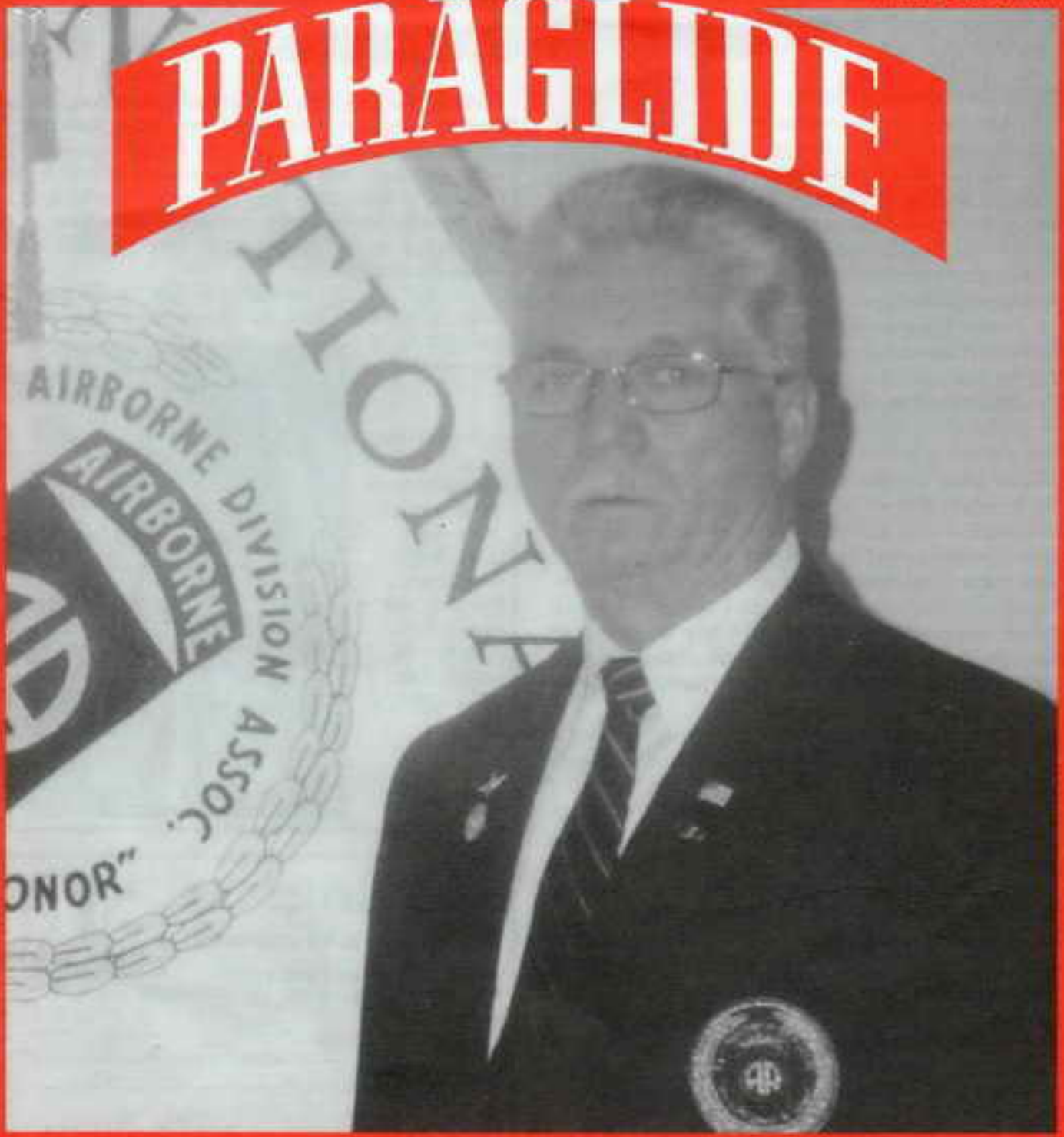
82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION ASSOCIATION
Chartered by the United States Congress

Winter 2004-05

PARAGLIDE



Pat Kelly
82nd Airborne Division
Association President for 2005

Gainesville, Florida - October 17-21, 2004

508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, WWII Association's 30th and Final Reunion

On October 19, 2004, the retirement of our beloved 508th PIR WWII Association at Camp Blanding, Florida, the birthplace of the regiment 62 years ago. More than 600 508th PIR veterans and guests witnessed the casing of the regimental standard that was followed in WWII, and over the past 30 years.



Rock Merritt, 508th PIR Association President.

The regimental standard and battle streamers will be preserved and displayed in the Camp Blanding Museum with a summary of the 508's achievements and sacrifices.

Kenneth (Rock) Merritt, President of the Association officiated at the retirement ceremony. The Deputy Commander, Camp Blanding hosted the ceremony, and the President of the Camp Blanding Museum & Historical Associates, Inc. (CBM&HA) accepted the 508th PIR standard and memorabilia for preservation and display in the museum.

Guest speaker, BG Mark T. Kimmitt, United States Central Command conveyed the appreciation of a grateful nation to the men of the 508th for their service and sacrifices on behalf of our country.

Paul Hamblin, Past President 508th PIR Association and Trustee presented an emotional recognition and farewell address. Paul identified the senior officers that supervised creation of the regiment, and acknowledged the dedication, skill and perseverance of the cadre that raised the regiment to maturity. These outstanding officers and noncoms developed a war fighting capable regiment that excelled on the battlefields of Europe. Paul concluded by reciting a poem titled "I AM FREE." He dedicated the poem to the memory of our beloved comrades lost on the European battlefields and subsequently.

Norb Studelska, Vice President, 508th PIR Association presented the Association's "Resolution to Retire." The resolution summarized the four years, one month, and four days of outstanding and heroic achievements of the 508th PIR, and the 30 years of camaraderie enjoyed by the association. The resolution was presented to the Camp Blanding Museum officials for preservation and display in the museum.

Subsequently, President Merritt "cased" the regimental standard and battle streamers, and transferred the shrouded assembly to the Camp Blanding Museum officials for preservation and display in the museum.

Rock Merritt concluded the 508th PIR Association part of the ceremony with the presentation of a plaque for display in the museum. The plaque expresses appreciation to the officers and men of Camp Blanding, and to the CBM & HA for the courtesy, assistance, support and friendship extended to our association over the many years. Rock said, "Today we entrust our memomorabilia and history to the CBM & HA — confident it shall be safeguarded and shared with the American public."

Effective about 12:15 p.m., October 19, 2004 at Camp Blanding, Starke, Floriday the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment Association ceased to exist. It was retired with dignity and honor and its memorabilia and assets were conveyed to the CBM & HA for preservation and display.

Note: Members of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment Association should be encouraged to join the 82nd Airborne Division Association, particularly the 508 Airborne Chapter. See page 84 for membership application.

Celebrating Our Veteran's Services

by Ryan Hagerty

On the corner of Main and Oak Streets, a young boy, bundled in his winter coat as the wind bites at his face, looks up to his parents and grandmother. He does not understand why they are standing within the crowd of families. Around the corner, the boy hears the distant ring of trumpets and the low din of drums. Within minutes, a proud procession of men march before their families to the tune of "God Bless America." He spots his grandfather, surrounded by men, with their gleaming shoes, crisp jackets, and stoic expressions. The stern look upon the now elderly man's face breaks into a grin as his grandson waves his miniature flag.

As the child grows, he begins to understand Veteran's Day and the parade held in his grandparent's town. Every year, as the leaves dance around the family as November air settles in, they stand on that same corner looking into the faces of the men that pass before them. These very men who once battled nations in the greatest wars for freedom are now facing a battle against tune. Every year, the familiar scene grows as families of all ages support the veteran they love.

On every Main Street across America, the story of the young child celebrating Veteran's Day with his family can be seen. I personally remember standing with my relatives and feeling so proud to be holding my American flag and waving at these men.

During one trip to my grandparent's house, as a curious boy in elementary school, I asked, 'Grandpa, why do you have both the American *Continued on page 80*